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Astoria, Ore.
P. O. Box 603.

The Captain's Pew.
By FRANK H. SWEET.
Copyright, 1907, by Frank H. Sweet.

DELILLY! You Delilly!" called Captain Drew sharply from the door of the cottage which fronted the marshes at the mouth of Squanton river.

At the sound of his voice a girl of fifteen, who had been half hidden by the marsh grass while slowly making her way in a boat through the narrow, winding salt stream, stood upright and looked calmly toward the shore. The light of the sunset was on her face, softening its habitually grave and determined expression.

"Come 'ere, I said," repeated the man, coming down the path to the dilapidated boat. The girl, still standing, leaned on her oar and pushed the boat to its moorings.

"What's wrong, dad?" she said lightly as she made the rope fast. Her face showed apprehension of some outbreak.

"I've been robbed, that's what. Look!" he exclaimed, pointing with a long, work stained finger in the direction of the house. "Look a-thar!"

With some dismay Delillah saw the high backed, old fashioned pew which they had occupied so long in Squanton church leaning against the porch.

"They've ripped 'em all out," continued her father in a snarling tone. "Higgin's boys been wheelin' all of 'em home this afternoon. They air goin' to hev 'em on 'societyed now. Pews isn't stylish an' societyed enough fur 'em. They got to hev 'em on 'societyed now."

"Oh, no, dad. They have decided to put in good, comfortable hardwood pews, and they will give you one."

"I don't want it! I won't hev it!" he cried excitedly. "They didn't hev the right to rip up my pew unless I said they could."

"But they voted, dad, and Mr. Doane says church property ain't like other property."

"Well, he'll find mine is," said the captain sourly. "If I'd 'a' knowed they was goin' to rip up my pew, I'd 'a' stud over it with a pistol!"

Delillah was silent. She could remember in substance, but could not repeat, all the minister had said in his comprehensive, businesslike directions about the renovation of Squanton church. Farseeing, but never visionary, he had held before their eyes a pleasing picture of their future prosperity, when attractive surroundings would be no small help in drawing to themselves people from the outlying towns. One-half the expense of repairs he bore himself.

"We air turned outen our rightful settin'," reiterated the old man. "My father's father set in that pew."

"Why, dad," argued his daughter gently, "you wouldn't wear the same clothes your father did. Why should you mind having a new pew?"

"I ain't goin' to hev no new pew, I tell ye, nor you nuther. You ain't never goin' to set your foot in that church ag'in!"

"Oh, dad, I must! I can't mind you this time!"

"If ever you go in thar ag'in, Delilly, you needn't come back here!"

Delillah sat for some time as he had left her. She was to be deprived, then,



"SHE DON'T WANT THE BOOKS," SAID THE CAPTAIN.

of the chief pleasure in her lonely life. It meant, too, separations from those who had been so kind and to whom she clung with girlish adoration. It seemed to her to be the climax of all the troubled, unsatisfied experiences of her life. She thought of her mother, whose gentle face she could scarcely remember. Did she have to bear such things? In thinking of her she grew less rebellious. She would be gentle and patient, too—to do right, for what was life given?

The winged needles of the pine trees over her head sifted down about her on the night breeze, and when the mists had enveloped the sand dunes and the tide had covered the marshes in a shimmering surface she still sat as her father had left her.

When a few days later the Rev. Howard Doane selected from his abundant library a few interesting books

as an excuse for his intended call at the cottage of Captain Drew, he was perhaps as near a deception as so conscientious a man could be. His real purpose was to determine in what way he could best mitigate the bitterness toward himself which he knew the old man felt.

Delillah met him at the door with eyes that he thought more wistful and features sharper than he remembered.

"I can't take them, thank you," she said firmly, refusing the proffered books. "Father would not like it," she added, with a blush.

"She don't want the books," said the gruff voice of the captain behind her.



"THERE'S A WRECK OFF COLFIN'S BEACH, DAD!"

"She won't be comin' over to the church any more nuther."

"I hope you will reconsider," began Mr. Doane.

"Well, I shan't. It don't take me long to make up my mind, and when I do it's fur good. Justice is justice."

Delillah had slipped away down the path and leaned listlessly over the gate. She could not bear to hear her father's words. After what seemed a lifetime she saw Mr. Doane courteously withdrawing in a manner which politely suggested he was tearing himself away rather than feeling from the captain's invective and terrible accuracy of statement. At the gate he gave his hand kindly to Delillah.

"We shall be sorry to lose you from Sunday school for a time," he said, but he added, with a hopeful smile: "No doubt your father will think better of this by and by. If you are in need of help, come to me."

The next few weeks were trying ones for the girl. Whenever she came upon a group of people talking earnestly the conversation, which was invariably upon church matters, was immediately hushed. She felt keenly the looks which the young people cast upon her. When a kind neighbor asked, "How's your father feeling today?" she felt conscious and uncomfortable.

In each yard through the village she found an unwelcome reminder, for the people had utilized the old pews for garden seats. The postmaster had placed his against the wall in the office, where it was speedily occupied by unemployed male Squanton. The children appropriated the silver numbers and wore them jauntily in their hatbands or on their coat lapels for badges.

The summer was nearly passed before the church was opened for worship. It was a sad day for Delillah. When the bell rang, she took her little Bible and walked across the fields to the pine woods. Companionship with nature seemed to strengthen and exalt her. Then she felt submissive and forgiving for the first time.

On a stormy day in November a hurricane raged along the north shore, and the little sea girt town of Squanton was laboring with it. In the village store the idlers—refugees from the hurricane—crowded about the stove and agreed that the storm was a "peeler."

"It's the kind that soaks in!" exclaimed Captain Drew, rising to look at the blurred pane. "Wouldn't keer to be off 'thatcher's jest now."

Settling back, he stretched his long limbs toward the stove again with an added sense of comfort.

The sound of laughter and greeting was hushed suddenly, and there was a perceptible backward movement near the door to admit a dripping figure. It was Delillah, with a white, scared face and long hair blown in a tangle about her head.

"There's a wreck off Colfin's beach, dad!" she gasped. "They say it's the Magnolia."

Captain Drew came to his feet instantly, with every man present.

"How'd you know 'bout it, Delilly?" he asked as he buttoned his greatcoat.

"I was on the point looking at the waves."

"You've no business to go prowlin' round in sech a storm," he said, not unkindly.

She drew him one side. "The minister is on board, dad. He was coming down from Boston," she said.

I read that the helpless men would go down before their very eyes. The wreck, though it lay in that part of the channel where the current was not at its strongest, was pounding upon a reef of rocks that jutted out from the bend. A sand bar, over which the waves were rolling like snow crested hills, lay between. To reach the Magnolia from the other side of the bay meant a journey of ten miles by land.

The vessel was pitching about like a desperate thing, showing first her keel, then the full sweep of the deck, with the crew clinging as they could. The mast was broken off six or eight feet above the neck and lay over the side, with a tangle of broken cordage and flapping sail.

Before the people crowding the headland could understand what was taking place Captain Drew had mustered a volunteer crew and in the lighthouse boat was making his way along the shore to cross below the bar. Through it all Delillah crouched beside a huge boulder, with her deep, concentrated gaze fixed upon her father's figure.

The distance that Captain Drew and his volunteers had to row was not great, but against the power of sea and wind they made little progress toward the wreck. Once a great sea broke over the boat, and a cry went up from the shore, but out of the trough the men rose again and had gained a length toward the other side.

It was the work of hours to make the lines fast and transfer the half frozen men to the shore. The rain was falling less heavily, and the agitated watchers could see the saved and saviors climb one by one over the steep bank. Mr. Doane's strong, light figure, that they all knew so well, was the last to reach the shore, and hardly had he done so when the vessel parted amidships.

It was he who first discovered, in the terrible confusion of storm and wreckage, that Captain Drew, who had been standing far out in the surf, with a rope slung about his waist, had been struck by a floating spar and borne down by the current. The end of his rope, which had been coiled ashore, was already vanishing on a retreating wave.

Without a word the minister plunged into the surf after the rope. Though



THE MINISTER PLUNGED INTO THE SURF.

an expert swimmer, he was twice beaten back. In vain the men shouted to him that it was useless, worse than impossible. He was deaf to their appeal, and just as the rope appeared on the crest of a huge swell he made a leap forward and seized it. The next instant he was lifted on a tremendous breaker and thrown far up the beach.

He had made a sharp turn of the rope above his waist, and, though shaken and bruised, he recovered himself quickly and helped the men draw the captain ashore. They felt his heart. They watched his lips. They believed he was dead. But the old mariner of Squanton had a strong hold on life.

It was some weeks before Captain Drew could be removed to his own home from the farmhouse to which he had been carried and months before he rose from his bed. Meantime Mr. Doane had supplied the best medical aid. During his frequent visits to the captain their disagreement was never touched upon.

One Sunday morning in spring when the syringa bush near the door was all abloom and the willows had put forth a tender green the captain, leaning heavily upon Delillah, hobbled into the sunlight and sat down upon the old pew.

"It does make a to'ble comf'table settee, don't it, child?" he said amiably.

Delillah did not reply, but she looked at him wistfully.

"Yes; my father's father used to set in it," he continued.

Just then the clear bell from the church at the head of the cove rang invitingly. The captain listened thoughtfully, digging his cane in the soft earth at his feet.

"Delilly, girl," he said at length, "I guess, bel'n's the parson didn't hold out agin me when I was hangin' to thet rope out thar in the stream, I dunno as I oughter hang out agin him any longer."

"Oh, dad!" exclaimed Delillah gleefully.

"Ye-es. 'Oh, dad,' has been kinder crazy fer a spell back, but he's come to his rightful senses now good an' strong. I guess, Delilly, now if you'll put your mother's Bible 'longside of me I'll set here an hour or two, an' you, Delilly, git your bunnit on an' go over an' set in t'other pew."